

# Japan, Rapanui and Chile's Uncertain Sovereignty

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Two recent articles by Japanese researcher Mr. Hideo Matsunaga (1991, 1994)<sup>2</sup> in *The Journal of the Pacific Society* prompt me to think about Chile's relationship to its Pacific territory, Rapanui, as the people of Easter Island call themselves and their land.

In the course of commenting on Matsunaga, and a source about Japanese ambitions in the Pacific contemporary to his documentation (Shimizu 1938), I want to explore my explanatory concept of "Uncertain Sovereignty" by which I mean the ambivalence that I think always has characterised Chilean official feelings about Rapanui since their relationship formally began on 9 September 1888 when Policarpo Toro read his proclamations and hoisted his country's flag along side the existing Rapanui one (see Hotus *et al* 1988).

"Uncertain sovereignty" I take to mean an unconscious official attitude, provoked by the circumstances of *Colonialism's culture* (Thomas 1994) which at once discomforts government opinion, provokes aggressive reactions to criticism and abidingly prevents effective policy and action.

## Outsider Claims

Prior to Chile's annexation, there had been other claimants to Rapanui, the earliest one being in 1770, when through their colony in Peru, Spaniards concluded a successful visit to the place with a formal annexation of their "San Carlos Island", complete with signed document and appropriate military ceremonial (Mellen 1986).

Although first sighted by Europeans in 1722, it was not until 1862 that slave raids, disease and out-migration subdued the Rapanui population. For some time in the 1860s to 1880s it was unclear which European power had control of the place: France (who had missionaries there), Britain (whose Navy had collected a *moai*, or ceremonial figure, there in 1868) or the USA, whose influence was growing in the Pacific. Additionally in the last three decades of the 19th century, Russian, German and Chilean warships had stopped for visits, to collect artefacts and publish their reports (For full listing, see McCall 1976; 1990).

The respective exploring parties of three countries, France, Britain and the USA, had recommended annexation, as did the German one in 1882. Spain's earlier claim had been completely forgotten after a century and never has been revived.

When Chile annexed Rapanui in 1888, it would seem that the uncertainty surrounding the sovereignty of Easter Island would abate. But, even then, there was alleged trouble. In the library of the Bishop Museum, there is an unattributed clipping from a San Francisco newspaper with a story about how France and Chile fought a naval battle over the latter's

claim to the island. This speculation was totally untrue, and seems to be based on an over-inventive seamen's account to a credulous reporter who, perhaps, paid for the information? The French Consul in San Francisco, Pesoli, writes to Paris on 21 September 1888, including a clipping from another San Francisco newspaper, the *Daily Report* of 19 September, indicating perhaps the basis of the sea battle rumour. The article declares:

'Great indignation is felt in all the islands', said Mr. Thorne, 'over the seizure of Easter Island by Chile. Captain Toro of the cruiser Angamos planted the Chilean flag and took possession in the name of his Government. What makes the people on the neighbouring islands feel so bad is the fact that Chili is going to establish a penal settlement there, and they have no desire for that kind of neighbours.'

When in Papeete Captain Toro was very proud of his seizure, and when remonstrated with by the French officers offered, if they would sail their men-of-war outside, to fight them, one after the other. The offer was not accepted'.<sup>3</sup>

In the French National Archives there is a letter dated 12 December 1902 explaining away a reported rumour ("*bruit*") in Peru that Chile was about to cede Rapanui to the USA<sup>4</sup>. A few years later, there was an exchange of letters between the (British) Foreign Office and Williamson Balfour, the latter wanting to urge His Majesty's Government to purchase Rapanui from Chile. These negotiations, when they were discovered, prompted some minor changes in the administration of the place which, for the most part, has languished unattended under the Chilean mandate for much of its history, until the last three decades.

Again, concern over sovereignty surfaced in a story circulating in 1984-5: the publicised threat of an American base being re-established on the Island. There was a secret communications base on Rapanui from 1966 to the election of Socialist President Dr. Salvador Allende, in 1970, but it quietly did its work as the island was infrequently visited<sup>5</sup>. On the election of Allende's left-wing government, the USA contingent of the base summarily departed, leaving equipment and a few dozen illegitimate children who today wonder about their distant fathers, safe in the anonymity of a large and distant land.

The question of sovereignty in 1984 arose when NASA, the (USA) National Aeronautics and Space Administration, proposed to establish an emergency landing site for their

Voyager space shuttles, complete with full radar facilities. Many people internationally were suspicious of NASA's Cold War motives and actions and saw the Chilean government (at that time, a dictatorship)'s eager acquiescence a sign that the country was willing to trade part of their control of Rapanui for American money. In the event, and after careful treaty negotiations into 1986, NASA's scaled down plan was accepted, but never fully implemented owing to the suspension of the American space program early in that year as a result of a launch disaster.

In 1988, to mark the centenary of the acquisition of Rapanui by Chile, the Islander citizen's committee, Te Mau Rapanui (often called the "Rapanui Council of Elders") published a detailed monograph, demonstrating the contemporary population's relationship to their land, and decrying the almost century of neglect that the island has suffered under Chilean rule (Hotus *et al* 1988). The monograph does not question Chilean sovereignty, but it does suggest strongly that Rapanui has never been treated equitably by the Chilean Government.

### Chilean Claims

To an outsider looking at Rapanui and Chilean affairs, the Elders's charge of derelection makes reasonable sense. In the beginning of the relationship, a Chilean Naval Captain, Policarpo Toro Hurtado, convinces his government to purchase the commercial interests on the island, to permit him and his brother, Pedro Pablo, to carry on the French founded sheep and livestock ranch and to license "immigration". Only about twenty Chileans respond to his call and settled on the island in 1888, the year of the annexation. Then, in 1892, the Toro brothers's ship sinks, most of the colonists depart or had died and the ranch is abandoned. For half a dozen years, there is no record that either Chilean government or private interests sent anyone to check up on their toe hold in an Oceanic empire. And, the Government, as is well-known, never paid completely for the Tahitian-based commercial interests, nor ever re-imbursed the Toro brothers for their colonisation expenses.

The story gets worse.

An unscrupulous entrepreneur, Enrique Merlet, acquires the ranching concession and sends a representative, Alberto Sanchez Manterola, to the island, where the elected (in 1892) King of Rapanui, Simeon Riro 'a Kainga Rokoroko He Tau, receives him well and attempts to come to a mutually congenial agreement with the outsider commercial interests, who soon were to usurp legitimate Rapanui claims. If King Riro had known what was going to happen to himself and his people, he might never have feasted Sanchez so well, nor offered him such abundant hospitality. In 1899, Merlet, with Sanchez's knowledge, has King Riro assassinated, dismisses a remorseful Sanchez and installs an Englishman, Horace Cooper, to brutalise the Rapanui population into submission and starts making expansive and extravagant claims to ownership of the entire island.

Merlet begins propagating the story so well known to outsiders, Chilean and foreigner, that a decadent King Riro

drank himself to death whilst in Chile and that the Rapanui were half castes and only remotely related to the original inhabitants of the island (see e.g. Métraux 1940).

Apart from occasional visits by the Chilean Navy, accounts of which were published in Chilean Naval publications, the Chilean government in the early part of this century makes no intercession or move to assist the population it so happily annexed a little over a decade before.

It is not until 1914, and then only after a mis-understood revolt (See McCall 1992) that results in a full Naval enquiry, that the first Chilean government representative is installed in the place. Prior to that, the manager of the commercial interests, an English-Scottish company, played Government representative as well.

Even after that, it was not until the Catholic Church, through Mgr. Rafael Edwards, intervened that the education, health and general well-being of the Rapanui were taken up by the Chilean Government, reluctantly. By "reluctantly". I mean that the Government charged the commercial interests with implementing health and education at *their* expense, which was kept always at a minimum. The Chilean government benefitted from lease payments and meat supplies for its ships, but returned none of this to the Rapanui or the island.

So, the Rapanui languished on their island, forbidden to leave it for much of this century, even confined to a few hectares of home and agricultural space in the areas known as "Hangaroa" and "Moeroa" today (For more detail, see McCall 1994).

### An Offer to Imperial Japan

In the 1930s, French ambitions in the Pacific had long since cooled (See Baré 1987), Germany was thinking about other parts of the world, the USA had its Great Depression and Britain was struggling with a tempestuous Europe. However, another growing world power was making itself increasingly well-known in the Pacific, the import of which would be much clearer in a few years time.

Mr. Shin Shimizu (1938), formerly editorial writer of the *Jiji Shimpō*, writes his explanation of the Japanese interest in the South Seas, which is published in English by the Foreign Affairs Association of Japan in November.<sup>6</sup>

Shimizu (1938: 1) notes that he writes his thirty-one page pamphlet because he "feels he must do ... to seek to correct certain false impressions which have influenced other nations in the attitude they have taken up towards our [Japanese] quite legitimate activities in the South Seas".

The writer claims a 400 year antiquity of Japanese interest in the South Seas, noting that there are Japanese citizens spread around Southeast Asia and that they have had success in agriculture, fishing and commerce due to their "exceptional industry and a physical constitution which made them fit to work in tropical countries", noting especially his countrymen's successes in the Philippines, then ruled by the USA (Shimizu 1938:2). He has especial praise for Japan's fishermen who brave the elements and hostile foreign governments in their quest for a good catch (1938:5-6).

He (1938: 7) notes that in 1936, the Japanese government had evolved “an effective South Seas policy”, including the creation of a South Seas Section in the Foreign Office and, simultaneously, the South Seas Development Company which were to be concerned with the sending of migrants to South Seas places, the acquisition of land leases, “monetary assistance for development work” and anything else required to strengthen Japan’s position in that region.

Shimizu (1938:9) comments also on the increased Japanese Naval activity of the day, noting that it is for defence and to “safeguard our national rights, elevate the national prestige and promote the nation’s development”. Whilst not directly relevant to the argument here, one of the motivating factors in Japan’s push to the South Seas is her growing population, outstripping local resources. Shimizu (1938:18–20, 28–29) writes that land in the South Seas is sparsely occupied and poorly developed. Japan’s surplus, energetic population should find a home there, he affirms, which they could profitably develop for all humankind.

Shimizu (1938:30)’s penultimate paragraph is pertinent to the next part of our story. He writes:

The Japanese are far from attempting to change the colouring of the world map; they only desire to get an outlet for their overpopulation at least in the South Seas. It is desirable that the various governments of the South Seas will lease part of their territories to Japan or at least make arrangements whereby the Japanese can carry on some industrial undertakings therein to the extent of providing a livelihood for her surplus population.

So, the context is right for Japan in the 1930s to be interested in acquiring South Seas lands and Chile, owing to its history of neglect and disinterest, is prepared to realise cash from a worthless (from their point of view) and neglected territory. These two interests, unbeknownst to the Rapanui, of course, meet for a couple of months in mid-1937.

Given that context of Japanese expansion and the need to develop what they consider undeveloped lands, a potential for Imperial interest in Rapanui becomes plausible, even though the remote territory is small compared to the other lands being sought.

Whilst distant from Chilean interests, both government and commercial, Rapanui in the 1930s is a thriving operation for the Williamson, Balfour company. The company have all the cheap labour they need, are largely unfettered by Chilean government requirements and have ready markets for the wool and other ranch products produced which are exported directly overseas to South America and Europe. Exploited for half a century as a “Company Island”, Rapanui is a comfortably profitable enterprise for its foreign developers and their frankly named, “Easter Island Exploitation Company” (See Porteous 1978, 1981, 1993; cf. Hunt 1951).

Matsunaga begins his discussion of the Japanese evidence for Rapanui being put on sale by Chile by reporting that in an earlier publication of a former Japanese

Ambassador to Chile, Mr. Eiji Kawasaki, in the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (Japan Economic Times) of 30 June 1975, mentions for the first time in print the Rapanui deal.

In the course of a brief description of Rapanui and its history, Kawasaki (deceased in 1985) reports that his superior, in 1938, Mr. Tetsuichiro Mayake, had “heard of the rumoured<sup>7</sup> intention of the Chilean Defence Ministry to cede Easter Island to Japan”. Kawasaki continues his tale:

Needless to say, Ambassador Mayake reported this [offer of cession] to the Japanese Government. The Japanese Navy was keenly interested in the island. However, negotiations were informally discontinued due to the island’s proximity to Australia<sup>8</sup> and the detrimental effects that this might have had on the course of Anglo-Japanese and US-Japanese relations”.

Matsunaga investigates further and discovers that Mayake was appointed Ambassador to Chile on 25 July 1936; Kawasaki served, as he said, as a temporary acting Ambassador in September 1940, and returned home due the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific after the Japanese bombing of the American military installations at Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

Matsunaga continues to dig and finds a document in the Japanese Foreign Ministry dated 7 July 1936, which contains a general description of Rapanui and its contact history, including the conditions of the lease of the sheep ranch company, Williamson, Balfour. Matsunaga believes that the document was a background paper for the sovereignty transfer discussions. References in the document suggest that at least commercial discussions were taking place, with the idea of Rapanui as a potential base for the Japanese fishing industry, represented by the large commercial company, Nihon Suisan.

Nihon Suisan was asked to be a party to the Rapanui negotiations since it was a fisheries firm, with shipping and trawling interests throughout the Pacific. In September of 1937, the Nihon Suisan’s ship, *Tonan-maru II*, commenced whaling in the Southern Pacific for the first time, so a base in Rapanui would have been very useful for their purposes.

But, Nihon Suisan, in its published company histories examined by Matsunaga, does not mention these negotiations. Perhaps they were too speculative or, given the turbulent events of World War II, simply forgotten?

Matsunaga too suggests that other, more commanding world affairs were occupying the Imperial Navy and the Japanese Government at that time: 1937 was the year when the Sino-Japanese War erupted. It was also a year when the Axis powers (Japan, Germany and Italy) were firming up their “Anti-Comintern” agreements which had been developing for some time.

What Matsunaga might have speculated is that the approach regarding Rapanui might have been on the initiative of an individual, rather than the official government. Whilst Chile was neutral during World War II, there were many Axis sympathisers in the country. Rapanui was a fairly obscure place in the 1930s and it could be that the negotiations were



not so much on the level of government, but by interested individuals, eager to please a country with whom they sympathised. That is, a Chilean official, could well have approached the Japanese Ambassador with a plan for either economic cooperation or, even, cession of sovereignty, but probably did so as an individual, rather than on behalf of official government intentions.

It is unlikely that the Chilean concerned was more than remotely familiar with Rapanui. The individual who provided the Japanese Legation in Santiago with some details of economic life on the island had little navigation knowledge, for the position of the place was given as 25° S Lat and 105° E! Matsunaga picks up on the error, which placed Rapanui near Singapore!

The correct coordinates, incidentally, are 27° 5' S Lat and 109° 20' W.

I sent a brief manuscript critique of the first Matsunaga (1990) article to him, through the Pacific Society in Tokyo. In rebuttal, he goes back to archive sources to discover further evidence that the negotiations were very official and not just an individual's private urges. In his "revised" second article, Matsunaga demonstrates, I think, that the negotiations between Chile and Rapanui were more than the rumours they seemed to be in his first report.

The author embarked on a detailed examination of Japanese Diplomatic archives, especially the 32 cases of "Cession and rental of territory of various countries and miscellaneous rumours" (A-4-1-0-1), most especially that section dealing with Chile: "Information from Latin American Countries, Miscellaneous:Chile (A-6-4-0-13-3)", which has resulted in additional light being thrown on this incident which, in its Japanese and Chilean context, does not seem so bizarre after all.

The Chilean Government is recorded as having offered Rapanui for sale to the highest bidder on 8 June 1937. Two days later, notice of this is sent to Tokyo in a top secret, coded telegram by the Japanese Legation in Santiago de Chile. The text<sup>9</sup> reads:

On the 8th, a call was received from the Under Secretary of the Chilean Navy. Mr. Hara<sup>10</sup> made his way to the office and the Under Secretary says the following: Owing to a difficult financial situation, the government wishes to sell Easter Island and Salas y Gomez to Japan, England, the USA or Germany, by order of the President and the Ministry of Defense. It is wished to know if Japan is interested in acquiring it, that this information should be communicated to your government and we wish a rapid reply, since this matter as yet has not been communicated to any other country.

Diplomat Hara takes the matter very seriously. The exchange between the Japanese diplomats in Santiago and their superiors in Tokyo is conducted in top secret code, as a mark of the importance placed on the Chilean offer. It is

further revealed to the Japanese diplomats a couple of days later that "The Chilean Navy needs to construct some cruisers and other war ships and in order to do that needs extra finance; therefore, the proposal to sell some islands of little importance to Chile".

This observation of "little importance to Chile" of Rapanui is entirely in keeping with the history of negligence of the time that I mention above and described in most serious Chilean sources on the place. Moreover, the sale is to the highest bidder since the Chilean Government does not fix a price for their real estate; they would take the highest price offered, they told the Japanese. If the Chilean government contemplates selling national lands, it is going to do it for top dollar!

A telegram from the Japanese Legation in Santiago to Tokyo of 1 July purports to quote the President of Chile who says that "according to the law, we (the Government) must obtain the approval of the Congress". At the same time, the telegramme notes that the Chilean Government is now carrying on negotiations with the USA as well as Japan. By 14 July, a parcel of information about Rapanui is sent by the Japanese Legation to Tokyo, and included amongst those papers is the fanciful book by E. C. Branchi (1934), *L'Isola d. Pasqua. Impero degli antipodi* which was indeed published in Santiago three years before, but is wildly inaccurate on most points to do with the island. Branchi was an amateur partisan of the sunken continent story of Oceanic origins. There is a note appended to these materials:

As it [Rapanui] is very distant, with poor soil, there are no minerals, nor any good harbour for anchorage, and also has no strategic value, for these reasons, the Chilean Government retains these islands [*sic*] only to isolate lepers and expatriate criminals (7)<sup>11</sup>.

Taking all this into account, the Director of American Affairs, Mr. Yoshizawa, writes on 23 July (sent on 26 of the same) to both the Director of Administration of the Ministry of the Navy, Mr. Toyota, and to Mr. Tamura, the President of Nippon Suisan, the fishing company. In this note, he summarises the Japanese Navy response as:

1. It [Rapanui] doesn't seem to have much value from the point of view of military strategy, but in spite of that it would be better to have the place;

2. In the future when aviation is more developed, this island certainly will be of great benefit; nevertheless, at this moment, it has very little value as an air base;

3. From the point of view of industry, the geography of the bay is suitable for a fishing base, but the Ministry of Fisheries and the specialist companies in that area should be consulted;

4. From the diplomatic point of view, it is evident that the USA would oppose this as a Japanese possession, so that although it

would be a military objective, one ought to refer to its [Rapanui's] ends [for Japan] in terms of fisheries. (8)

From the Japanese documentation, the consideration to purchase Rapanui lasted a scant two months, from the first telegram of 9 June to the closing letter of 9 August, with no further notations, as other events distracted Japanese interest or, perhaps, the Chilean government met some internal opposition to the cash raising proposal.

Matsunaga firmly places the eventual failure of the negotiations on larger world events. The 6 July 1937 letter from the Japanese Government Director of American Affaires, Yoshizawa, to Tamura, President of the Nippon Suisan fishing interests, a natural developer of Rapanui, pre-dates by one day the "Rokokyo Incident" which sparked the Japanese-China War. At that crucial time, Japan did not wish to risk displeasure either with Britain, the nationality of the commercial concessionaire on Rapanui, nor the USA's jealous guard of South American relations through its oft insisted "Monroe Doctrine" dating back to 1823.

The President of Chile mentioned in the dispatches was Arturo Alessandri Palma (1868–1950), in his third term. His period in the Presidency commenced in 1920, ceasing in 1924 with a military *coup*, returning in 1925. In 1932, Alessandri was elected President again, continuing his promises to cure Chile's recurrent economic problems. The year after the brief negotiations with Japan, his government lost in elections to a "Popular Front" because in spite of an improved economic situation, Alessandri was said to have not taken sufficient interest in social welfare.

### Colonialism and Uncertain Sovereignty

As is not unusual in colonialism, much of the negotiations of a subject people's fate takes place without their consent or, even, knowledge. Almost contemporary with the Chilean offer to sell Rapanui to the highest bidder is the story that Vanuatu was offered by Britain and France as a homeland for Jews from Nazi Germany. Noted journalist, David Jenkins, read documents a few years ago in USA government archives of moves on the eve of the Pearl Harbour bombing to sell or give Papua New Guinea to the Japanese, to appease the needs of the growing empire and to avoid war.<sup>12</sup>

Chilean plans for Rapanui are discussed and agreed in Santiago, only later are they brought to the island as decisions. Chile, in these sorts of relations with Rapanui, is not unique as a metropolitan power dominating a distant territory. Between nominally sovereign states, much foreign aid discussion takes place distant from those who eventually are to receive programmes which often are unsuitable and fail due to lack of local consultation.

Matsunaga demonstrates clearly that the 1937 negotiations between Japan and Chile were very real. There are other allegations of sale, though, that are much more speculative. During my second field trip (1984-5), I was told by two different persons that Chile was negotiating with the USA (or Japan) to transfer the island in exchange for a cancellation of outstanding foreign debts.

As the little Polynesian polity has greater contact with the world, there is less lag time between what people outside Rapanui are saying about the place and what people locally know.

To cope with this uncertainty and the perceived threat of decisions being taken without local consultation, Rapanui (like others) resort to rumour. On Rapanui itself, gossip and rumour play a large role in community life. Gossip, the discussion of a third, absent party by two or more persons present, is a method of building connections and associations. By the very act of listening to gossip, those present collude against the topic of the conversation. Sometimes, gossip may have a basis in fact, but as often it will be speculation and conjecture: the purpose of the gossiping act is social, in terms of bonding, and not informational.

Rumour is somewhat different. Its purpose is to clarify, to answer, to attempt to solve what is unclear and rumour on Rapanui usually centres on the actions of outsiders and their intentions, since these are so poorly communicated and explained locally.

For example, the story of a naval battle between France and Chile in 1888 that I mentioned above was reported to me during my first fieldwork from 1972-1974 in two ways. One informant located the action at the time of the Chilean annexation, much as I recounted it above; a younger person suggested that it had almost taken place in 1965, when a young Rapanui school teacher led a successful protest for human rights on the island that resulted in the territory becoming a full civil one in 1966. Some others transformed this rumour into gossip and told me that it was the school teacher who had summoned the French warships, which story persists in some quarters, even official ones, to this day!

Rumour, therefore, in the colonial context, can be taken as a kind of informational protest; a cry from a local minority against an impenetrable national bureaucracy; an attempt to escape what the sociologist Max Weber called the "Iron Cage" of contemporary, invigilated society.

I do not believe, as I first thought, that the 1937 Japan-Chile negotiations over Rapanui were rumour. Clearly, they had a very serious basis in factual, albeit brief, communications. In the context of Japan's views of itself as having a legitimate right, even need, to expand populationally, militarily, commercially, even territorially, into the South Seas in the 1930s, as Shimizu documents, she was a natural potential buyer from a cash strapped Chile. The fisheries angle provided added interest to the negotiations.

### Chile's Uncertain Sovereignty

This leads me to the question of Chile's "uncertain sovereignty" that I mention in the title of this historical enquiry into a tiny footnote.

I do not believe that Chile has been at ease with its colonial stance, and the Rapanui have been aware of this for some time. On the one hand, there were the needs of national pride, some way of marking the victory of the "War of the Pacific" and Chile's projected role in the international community. In the European scramble for colonies of the

1880s, having a colony was to become an important country and, so, Chile was persuaded to follow suit, unlike any of the other South American republics, mostly founded on the French revolutionary ideals of “liberté, égalité and fraternité”. Chile had no need to expand into the Pacific, having sufficient colonisable land in the recently (then) pacified South. And, desolate though it was, there was the land to the north with its rich promise of mineral wealth. Chile’s act of colonialism was not out of desperation, but out of pride. Chile had no practical use for Rapanui and, particularly in the 19th century, had several ranches many times the size of Rapanui on its own mainland. Chile did not need the Rapanui lands and did not have the facilities to exploit the Rapanui seas. The colonisation was a mistake and, therefore, the Chilean government abidingly has demonstrated an uncertainty, even an ambivalence, as in the negotiations for sale I cite above, about its singular colonial possession.

Even when no actual negotiations were in train, Rapanui, in their own uncertainty about Chile’s official intentions, imagined deals being made, as usual, behind their backs.

The Chilean government did not know what to do with Rapanui at the end of the 19th century and scarcely has come to any conclusion about what to do with it at the close of this one. The government archives are choked with plans for Rapanui and every few years, earnest governments create new commissions to study what is to be done with Rapanui, a distant place about which few Chileans know anything other than that they should feel a kind of paternal affection. Government ministers and, since the dictator Pinochet, Chilean Heads of State, visit Rapanui, bestow a public work or two and depart with promises of radical change and improvement. Each commission affirms its intentions to do real work, unlike predecessors, and succeeds only in planning for tropical development in a *sub*-tropical environment, the production of produce that will be too expensive to sell anywhere, owing to distance and, more recently, the encouragement of tourism without taking into account the poor transport infrastructure by the government monopoly airline, LAN-Chile.

To take a recent example, in late 1994, another commission has been created in response to Rapanui demands to be taken seriously. In October 1994, the “Island Commission of the Regional Council” went to Rapanui, “...with the aim of analysing together with the organised community of Easter [Island] a proposed law to redefine the place’s legal status”<sup>13</sup>. President Eduardo Frei, during a four hour stop over on Rapanui, announced on 10 November the construction of a new air terminal, airport renovations and a sea port, opened a new Governor’s Office, offered to turn over additional government lands to the local population and to increase flights (Air Force and LAN-Chile) to the island<sup>14</sup>. The visit was marked by a protest of Rapanui carrying their own flag, who were not permitted to enter the area where the President was making his promises.

As 1994 ended, yet another government commission was announced by President Frei, this time to present “specific

plans” for the Chilean mainland regions of Aisén and Magallanes, along with Rapanui. This commission is to be “interministerial” and, as usual, it begins by gathering information about its territory of focus, as if the task had never been done before<sup>15</sup>. The interministerial and the Regional Council Committees almost certainly will deliver conclusions in 1995 much like those that have been produced in the past and, most likely, with similar misunderstandings and consequent errors.

On the basis of this indicative Japanese incident, and others alluded to above, I believe that Chile will continue to be troubled by its “uncertain sovereignty” over Rapanui until it changes the way that it has related to the place since 1888. That was the last time that the Chilean government, though Captain Policarpo Toro, took even minimal interest in consulting the Rapanui themselves. Government commissions rarely have Rapanui on them and there has never been an open, public consultation on the island itself by a decision-making, ranking government body. The two bodies created at the end of 1994, by their very governmental nature, have no Rapanui representation and, apart from the usual comfortable visit to the island that these committees make, usually for a few days, there will be no open, public consultation with the Islanders.

Therefore, the information that goes into these official and costly enquiries remains inaccurate and fanciful and, consequently, so do the conclusions and recommendations that result, however well-intended. Chile will continue to suffer its official angst of “uncertain sovereignty” so long as it continues to fail to consult the Rapanui about Rapanui.

The Islanders have long been willing to talk, but they have yet to find anyone in power in Chile free from the fear of “uncertain sovereignty” to listen to what they know about their island and what should be done with it.

## Footnotes

1. Grant McCall teaches social anthropology at the University of New South Wales.
2. Both these references are in Japanese. Matsunaga (1991) was translated for me by William Purcell, while Matsunaga (1994), with further evidence for his case (prompted by his reaction to my commentary on his earlier piece, he says) was translated by Taiheiyo Gakkai Shi, and kindly sent to me by Dr. Juan Grau, of the Ecological Institute of Chile.
3. Archives d’Outre-Mer, SG Océanie, A-121, c131, Pesoli, Gérant du Consulat de France, San Francisco à Colonies et Marine, 21 septembre 1888.
4. Archives d’Outre-Mer, SG Océanie 141, Dossier B25.
5. The American “secret” base in the 1960s actually was a joint facility with the Chilean Air Force, although official documents that I have seen suggest that the line of command was not always clear. When Dr. Allende was a parliamentarian and visited Rapanui, he was refused permission to inspect the base. However, the few tourist parties venturing to the island in 1967 and 1968 often were invited by the American commander to take coffee and donuts on the base itself. My first visit to Rapanui was in one of those parties in November 1968.
6. I read a copy of this in the French *Archives d’Outre-Mer* in Aix-en-Provence, catalogued under “BR. 10720B”.



- 7.. In a brief personal interview in June 1994, Matsunaga told me that the translation "rumoured" should have been more like "talked about", for reasons that he is able to demonstrate in his research.
8. This false assertion is based on the incorrect geographical positioning of Rapanui as being near Singapore, which Matsunaga mentions further on.
9. Matsunaga quotes in Japanese the original Japanese text. I must work from the translation in Spanish by Taiheyo Gakkai Shi, already credited above. It is likely that nuance may have been lost but, I think, the plain meaning text is clear enough.
10. Mr. Takeshi Hara was the Military Attaché to the Japanese Legation with considerable knowledge and experience of the Spanish language and Latin American affairs. He had been decorated by foreign governments at his previous postings and had been in Chile since 1930. Hara would have been easily able to tell a "rumour" from a concrete government offer through his experience and his network of contacts in the country.
11. These page numbers refer to the unpublished Spanish translation by Taiheyo Gakkai Shi.
12. David Jenkins (pers. com.) told me that the documents contained a note that for the deal to go through, of course, Australia and the Netherlands, "owners" of New Guinea Island and surrounding territories, would have to be consulted!
13. *El Mercurio (Valparaíso)*, 23 October 1994.
14. There were several articles reporting these events and promises, but the most complete is by Elia Simeone Ruiz in *El Mercurio* (Santiago) of 11 November 1994.
15. *El Mercurio* (Santiago) of 5 December 1994.

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*Readers are reminded that the views of contributors are not necessarily shared by the Editors or by the Foundation.*

## Comment on the two hanau

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Two recent articles in these pages (Mulloy 1993, Langdon 1994) have renewed the old argument over the meanings of the Rapanui terms *hanau 'e'epe* and *hanau momoko*. Both articles have a case to make, but neither presents a complete story.

Langdon disagrees with Mulloy's interpretation of the word *momoko* as meaning 'thin', suggesting that it was a later intrusion into the language, postdating the first recording of the *hanau momoko* tradition, but predating Englert. Presumably, Langdon would have it originally mean 'short-eared', in contrast with *'e'epe*, presumably meaning something like 'eared', from *epe*, 'earlobe'. However, *mokomoko* with the meaning 'thin' or 'sharp' was recorded by Roussel in his vocabulary, collected in 1865 (Roussel 1908, Churchill 1912), whereas no mention of the 'long ears' or 'short ears' was recorded until twenty years later (Thomson 1889). A more recent study (Johnston 1978, with informant Sergio Rapu), attempts to provide a comprehensive list of reduplicated words in Rapanui, and gives *moko*, 'thin'; *mokomoko*, 'very thin' and *momoko*, 'thin (plural)'. The pattern of full reduplication to indicate quantity and partial reduplication to indicate number is almost universal in this